

# Public Memory, National Heritage, and Memorialization of the 1918 Finnish Civil War

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## Abstract

*Finnish Civil War in 1918 left the newly independent country (1917) badly scarred for decades. In this paper we assess the difficult public memory, national narrative and memorialization process of the war. We take as our starting point a recent public crowdsourcing organized by the State-broadcasting company about the material traces of conflicts on Finnish soil. We examine themes raised by the public in the crowdsourcing and use them as foundation to map heritage perspectives related to the memories of the war. Special attention is paid to the memorial landscapes of the war. In the past century, the remembrance of the war has gone through several stages, from the complete denial of memorizing the defeated side and the associated clandestine remembrance practices based on rural folk religion, to today's situation where the war is largely seen as a shared national tragedy. We outline the current status and importance of Civil War heritage based on public perceptions and stake out some directions for future research.*

## Keywords

Finland, Civil War, Archaeology, Heritage, Memory, Monuments

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This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:

Seitsonen, O., Mullins, P. R., & Ylimaunu, T. (2019). Public memory, National Heritage, and memorialization of the 1918 Finnish Civil War. *World Archaeology*, 51(5), 741–758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2020.1724821>

## Introduction

In 2018 a host of memorial events, museum exhibitions, public lectures, historical studies and popular histories marked the centenary of the Finnish Civil War between the right-wing Whites and left-wing Reds (e.g. Hoppu et al. 2018; HY 2018; Tepora and Roselius 2018). Many of these were targeted to local audiences and attempted to highlight neglected or overlooked events and themes (e.g. Aalto 2018; Näre 2018). For example, a local Civil War exhibition in the Museum Center of Tampere, one of the Red strongholds, has been on display now for a decade (Haapala et al. 2008). However, the traumatic events of 1918 have been less studied from archaeological or heritage perspectives (Mullins 2017; Seitsonen and Kunnas 2009; Takala 1998).

In this paper we take as our starting point a recent public crowdsourcing about the material traces of conflicts on Finnish soil organized by the State-broadcasting company Yleisradio (YLE 2014). Finnish Civil War localities were second most numerous among the entries marked by the public on an online map (Fig. 1). These represent a range of sites related to various aspects of the war and its aftermath. We frame first the historical setting of Finland in 1918 and present the YLE crowdsourcing project (Seitsonen 2017). Then we examine themes brought up in the crowdsourcing and use them as foundation to map heritage perspectives related to the memories of war. Special attention is paid to the memorial landscapes of the war which today loom as a shared national tragedy. As there have been few studies of Finnish Civil War from a heritage angle, interpretations presented in this paper can work as a baseline for future studies. In the end we delineate some potential lines of research on the subject. Analogous contested heritage themes are increasingly studied around the world, and Finnish Civil War research can contribute to these ongoing discussions (e.g. Carr 2014; Drozdowski et al. 2016; Gonzalez-Ruibal 2017; Viejo-Rose 2015).

Marianne Hirsch's (2001) concept of post-memory focuses on the second or third generation's memories of traumatic events experienced by previous generations, for example, the Holocaust, or in this paper, brutal Civil War. Memory, whether individual or social, is based on lived experiences (Assmann 2006: 215). Reinhart Koselleck (2004: 258) has suggested that history and historical time is constituted of experiences and expectations which "produce relation between past and future", and can be understood together as agents of social and political dynamics in a society. James Delle (2008: 65–67) defines memories in three different ways. First, public memory is an official and national narrative of a state. Second, social memory is an unauthorized memory of, for example, political parties or communities, and can differ from the public memory. And third, there is social myth which is a memory of events that did not happen or existed somewhere else. Importantly, memory is a living process changing in time (Connerton 1989: 21–23, 2009; Hirsch 2001). In this article we are primarily interested in the memory of the past within contemporary present, and how that past is staged. The key question here is thus not what happened in the past, but how it is recalled by and in the public today (Brockmeier 2002: 33; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 3; Wilson 2009). Consequently, the remembered past(s) of people and communities can differ from the historical or archaeological pasts, yet they are no less valuable as witnesses of the heritage process.

*<Figure 1 around here>*

## War of Liberation, Red Rebellion, Mutiny

The Finnish Civil War was one of the political upheavals in the end of the First World War instigated by the collapse of the Russian Empire which Finland had been part of since 1809. After Finland declared its independence from Russia in December 1917, hostilities broke out in January 1918 between the leftist Reds and the Finnish government troops, dubbed as Whites (e.g. Tepora

and Roselius 2014). Forces on both sides consisted mostly of irregular local militia with minimal military training. The ongoing World War and Russian revolution shaped the Civil War, as Finnish militias became supported by foreign troops. The White Guard was boosted by an Imperial German Expeditionary Forces and Swedish volunteers, whereas the Red Guard was supported by Red Russians. In the end, the White side proved victorious with the help of the Germans in May 1918. The international and transnational character of Finnish Civil War was neglected for decades in the national narrative, other than describing the Whites as justified liberators of the newly independent country from external threats.

As is common in civil wars, the Finnish Civil War saw brutalities and atrocities committed by both sides, dubbed as “Red Terror” and “White Terror” (Tikka 2018). Altogether about 36,000 lives were lost from a nation of three million people, and only a fraction of these in combat (National Archives of Finland 2004; Roselius 2006). The Red Terror claimed lives of nearly 2000 people, whereas the Whites executed over 7000 Reds in impromptu trials. In spring 1918 over 80,000 people, nearly three percent of the Finnish population, were imprisoned by the Whites. 12,000–14,000 more Reds lost their lives to malnutrition, disease, and executions in the prison camps after the war, including women and children. The treatment and executions of women has especially been the focus of recent public discussion (Fig. 2; see Agricola 2018). The Red Guard had about 1500 female combatants and many more women in supporting roles which was seen as an outrage by the Whites and their German allies (Hentilä 2018: 31).

<Figure 2 around here>

The ambiguous nature of the Finnish Civil War is well-described by the names attached to it, carrying the weight of the opposing political agendas. The conflict has been dubbed a “War of liberation”, “Civil War”, “Class war”, “Red rebellion” and “War of amateurs”. Likewise, the warring sides have been derogatively referred to as “butchers” (for Whites; Fi. “lahtari”) and “red russkies” (Fi. “punaryssä”) or “commies”. The Whites promoted aggressively the theme of “liberation” after the war and it became dominant in the interwar period in the 1920s–1930s. It emphasized the newly gained independence from Russia and avoided the trauma of the inhumane treatment of the Reds (Hentilä 2018: 83). Historian Seppo Hentilä (2018: 100) argues that in the interwar period Finland was largely an authoritarian White society celebrating the War of Liberation (also Silvennoinen et al. 2016). However, it must be noted that the Social Democratic Party, which was on the losing side, remained the biggest party in the Finnish parliament the entire interwar period and formed government already 1926–27.

In less than a year the Civil War claimed approximately 1.2 percent of the population, making it proportionally one of the bloodiest conflicts in 20th century Europe. This resulted in national tensions and painful memories of “brother against brother” which have shaped, and continue to shape, national, local and family memories (Silvennoinen et al. 2016).

### **Crowdsourcing public memories of a traumatic war**

The YLE conflict site crowdsourcing took place in 2014 and resulted in nearly 2000 points-of-interest (POI) marked by the public on an online map. The entries were stored in an open access Conflict Site Database (CSDB) which is reviewed elsewhere in detail (Seitsonen 2017). Sites affiliated to the Civil War were second most common in the crowdsourcing (11 percent of POI; Table 1), outnumbered only by Second World War sites (57 percent). This illustrates the role Finnish Civil War still plays a century later in public memories.

Spatially, Civil War entries concentrate in southern Finland along the main frontlines which were drawn according to the hubs of Red resistance in the industrial cities (Fig. 1). The northernmost site was marked at Salla in Lapland, at the execution site of a Red Guard soldier. Interestingly, no Civil War sites were marked outside modern Finnish borders (in contrast to Second World War sites), even though longest Civil War battles took place in the area ceded to Soviet Union after Second World War (now Russia) (Seitsonen and Kunnas 2009).

YLE journalists used the outcomes of the crowdsourcing to write an article with six stories illuminated by the map entries. One of the stories is related to the Civil War, whereas the other five deal with Second World War and its aftermath. Significantly, these stress also cruelties committed by Finns: one of the Second World War stories discusses the concentration camps<sup>1</sup> established by Finns for the “non-ethnic civilians” in conquered parts of Soviet Union, and the Civil War story describes White Terror, a massacre carried out by Whites in a Red Cross military hospital for Red combatants. This likely reflects the journalists’ attempt to highlight more controversial histories than the usual heroic war narratives (Seitsonen 2017).

The entries in CSDB are discussed below starting from the most numerous categories, as marked by the public, and expanding on these themes from the heritage perspective; examples of public entries for each category are also provided. To further assess the public perceptions, the POI were affiliated to the warring sides, based on the terms and phrasing used by the public (Table 1). If the words “red”, “rebel”, “Russian” or “russki” were used in the description, POI was affiliated to the Red side, and if “white”, “butcher”, “German” or “Civil Guard”, POI was linked to the White side. Majority of the locations (78 POI) were affiliated generally to the Civil War-era.

<Table 1 around here>

### ***Battlefields and military positions***

*“...First World War bunker...battles were fought between the Germans and Reds at this place during the Civil War [sic]” (CSDB:b96b402d-a730-4be1-967d-f0b902b6512e)<sup>2</sup>*

Sites related to fighting were most commonly marked by the public (84 POI). This might have been affected by the YLE introductory article which emphasized the traces of military combat (YLE 2014), and reflects how the framing of a crowdsourcing can shape its results (Seitsonen 2017). Most of the battle-related entries lack closer affiliation to a specific combatant.

The described localities range from battlefields and fortifications to destroyed bridges. Most of the battle sites are nowadays inconspicuous and only locally known places with overgrown foxholes and trenches. Sometimes not even those remain, especially of the fights that took place in the winter when positions were dug in snow (Seitsonen and Kunnas 2009). Some bullet- and shrapnel-riddled structures have also been preserved to commemorate the war (Fig. 3).

Officially, Civil War battlefields are protected as “ancient monuments” by the Finnish Antiquities Act (295/1963), alongside the country’s (Russian-origin) First World War fortifications. This differs from the other 20th century conflict sites which have no official heritage status, such as places related to Second World War or to the Russian post-Second World War occupation of parts of Finland (most importantly “Porkkala Parenthesis” area adjacent to country’s capital Helsinki 1944–1956) (Seitsonen 2018). The National Heritage Agency classification criteria for the heritage

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<sup>1</sup> The term was used in Finland during the war, before it became linked with the Nazi camps.

<sup>2</sup> CSDB id refers to the original YLE database which has now gone offline from the YLE site as the crowdsourcing service provider ceased to exist, but can be found at: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17080.49926> (Seitsonen 2017. Supplementary Material 1).

value of Civil War “fortifications” focuses on their significance “as witnesses of a historical event” and in “creating or symbolizing the local identity” (NHA 2015: 12). Considering the protection and research needs, archaeological studies of “little known positions from year 1918” are recommended by the Heritage Agency owing to the “poor state of research” (NHA 2015: 10). There is a lack of archaeological studies of Civil War sites and the breadth of traces is poorly known; so far, all fieldwork has focused on battlefields (Harju 2006; Seitsonen and Kunnas 2009; Takala et al. 2018).

<Figure 3 around here>

### **Execution sites, graves and memorials**

*“...the convicted [Reds] were executed against the granary wall which still has small holes as a memory of this. The hillslope descending to the old store was named blood hill as the blood spilling down colored the slope red...[sic]” (CSDB:928470f1-ba32-4631-9a9d-3c0d4541a697)*

Altogether 86 POI related to execution and grave sites and memorials were marked by the public. These are overlapping, since the bodies were often buried at the execution sites and memorials raised later at the same place. Majority of the public entries in this category represent White Terror, such as execution places of Reds (Fig. 4). This illustrates the living imprint that the massive White post-war retribution left in the Finnish public memory. Only two POI relate to the Red Terror which was smaller in scope, yet no less brutal:

*“‘Blood Sweeping Stone’...where 1918 the Reds slowly murdered miller Kustaa Hemmilä...his cries of agony were heard behind the esker...[sic]” (CSDB:d09d86a7-2e06-42fe-bf30-867fd7ce7aaa)*

Some entries focus on the debated tales of White brutality towards Red women (see Agricola 2018; Liukkonen 2018):

*“...Red female prisoners executed in 1918...the name Noisy Hill comes from the screaming of the female prisoners as they were shot...[sic]” (CSDB:c8a6165e-0649-478f-8ac0-c349bf17a5d3)*

<Figure 4 around here>

Details of the executions and violence survived in the post-war decades as covert memories in the local Red folklore. These focused on the ways that the death and victimization at the hands of White Guard was inscribed into the landscape as places of memory. These sites became active agents that have kept the transgenerational remembrance alive. Most of the marked memorials were also affiliated by the public to the Reds (16 POI). Nearly 300 Red memorials (Werstas n.d.) and over 400 White memorials, including ones dedicated to the German expeditionary forces, are known around the country (Peltonen 2003; Sirola 2017). Although now there are almost as many memorials commemorating both sides of the war, this is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Immediately after the war, the official commemorative landscape was taken over by the victorious Whites, who celebrated the nation’s liberation by the White Army. Many of the early heroic White memorials were indeed dubbed as “Statue of liberty” (Peltonen 2003). Art historians describe the haste to raise White monuments as a “statuomania [sic]” which resulted in repetitive generic themes (Heino 2018). Statues of liberty are typically classicist naked male figures with a sword, a shield, and a helmet. This iconography linked the White side to the tradition of Classical Western civilization, contrasting with the losing Red side that was ideologically connected to the “barbaric” east of the former Russian overlords (see Koponen et al. 2018). It was used also consciously to demote Civil War’s brutality, violence, and trauma (Heino 2018; Sarkamo 2018).

Perhaps the most gruesome example of the Whites' effort to deny Reds dignified deaths took place in Viipuri (now Vyborg in Russia). The White Guard conquered the Red stronghold of Viipuri in April 1918 in an intensive battle, during which the Reds executed over 30 imprisoned Whites in the Viipuri prison. Consequently, the Whites launched a brutal reprisal to eliminate Reds and their sympathizers. Whites executed about 1200 people, including 400 Russians who were not necessarily allied with the Reds; this widespread killing of all the encountered Russians has been compared with ethnic cleansing (Westerlund 2004: 160–163). Over 10,000 Reds and their families were also imprisoned. Incarcerated Reds were then forced to open the graves of their already-buried comrades in the Papula Red's Heroes Cemetery and rebury them in what was referred to as the "dog's graveyard" outside the "blessed grounds". This gravesite holds an unknown number of Reds executed by the White Guard. When oral histories were recorded in the 1960s, nearly every memoirist referred to these executions and the graveyard itself. Finally, in 1961 a memorial was placed at the Vyborg mass grave, but not by Finland or Finnish groups; instead, it was erected by Soviet Union which has held the city and Finnish Karelia since 1944.

The undignified name dog's graveyard is a common designation for many Red graves outside churchyards (Hentilä 2018: 80). Church and priests had an active role on the White side during the Civil War, and in the post-war White imagination, the Reds' relationship to religion was seen as hostile and derogatory, even if in practice this usually was not the case (Huhta 2010: 197–198). The public discussions in the post-war White context often had a religious dimension and defended the conflict's outcomes and justified the White atrocities with biblical references (Huttunen 2010: 261).

For the defeated Reds, any public commemoration was denied in the 1920s–1930s. They were not allowed to mark execution and grave sites, gather at them, or take flowers to them. At the outbreak of Second World War in 1939 there were about 300 official White memorials and 15 Red ones in the country (Peltonen 2003). Many Red graves and memorials had also been degraded in the interwar period; stories of their defacement are amongst the most common transgenerational themes on the defeated side. By 1929 about 50 spontaneous memorials had been raised at execution places and gravesites, most of which were destroyed by the authorities (Peltonen 2003: 209). For example, at Varkaus in 1922 a Red monument was stolen and sunken into a lake the night before it was to be revealed and a new one was not raised until 1946. In 1923, a monument was arranged at the Hämeenlinna Ahvenisto cemetery's Red mass grave despite the opposition of the church and the officials exploded it. The relatives who organized the monument were sued by the authorities, and a new memorial was raised only after in 1940. The White government's effacement of the post-war Red mortuary landscape fueled a rich transgenerational Red folklore of White atrocities and victimization.

Despite the state's resistance to Red commemoration, numerous unofficial, private Red places of memory formed a hidden landscape of trauma, dotted with personally valued places that stood witness to, and confirmed, the brutality of the officially "whitewashed" White Terror. The struggle to establish public memorials and acknowledgement for the defeated Reds was long, and it came only with the Winter War of 1939–1940 when the working-class joined the fight against the Soviet Union, somewhat as a surprise to the bourgeois politicians. A deliberate attempt was made to unify the scarred country when the Reds were finally given the freedom to commemorate their Civil War experiences in 1940 (Kormano 2006). The formerly silenced trauma witnessed by the network of places of Red suffering started to be publicly commemorated, and the largest number of Red monuments was erected in 1946 immediately after the Second World War (Peltomaa 2003).

The ensuing commemoration humanized the Red dead by placing memorials at their unmarked graves, and acknowledged the death and violence at prison camps, execution sites, mass graves, and cemeteries alike. Execution spots and mass graves of Reds are scattered across Finland, and their

post-war memorialization materialized the brutality of the White Terror for the Reds. As an example, on April 6, 1918 about 38 Reds had been executed and buried in bogs of Paukanneva, Nurmo. Some of the dead were secretly exhumed and reburied by their families soon afterwards; some bodies were moved to a Red mass grave in Ähtäri in 1919; the last 18 were exhumed in 1944 and moved to Nurmo cemetery; and finally, after Second World War a memorial to the 21 anonymous Reds was erected at their gravesite at Nurmo cemetery (Fig. 5). This is a typical process providing formal burial and memorialization for Reds in consecrated ground. However, systematic resistance to the Red narrative continued into the 1960s.

<Figure 5 around here>

Despite the irregular character of the war, also some renowned battlefields became commemorated. Immediately after the war these were remembered with gallant statues celebrating the White liberation (Peltonen 2003). Perhaps the best-known examples are the two monuments memorializing White conquest of the industrial city of Tampere: a still-disputed Statue of Liberty, and statue of General C.G.E. Mannerheim, commander of the White Army and commander of the Finnish Army in Second World War. In 1984, a Red counter-memorial was placed on the ridge that was one of the final Red strongholds in Tampere. However, it has now become surrounded by a modern upper-class neighborhood, not the most stereotypical setting to commemorate working-class soldiers. Other famous White battle memorials were raised at Kirkkonummi and Ahvola (Seitsonen and Kunnas 2009). The latter battlefield is now in Russia (at the first author's ancestral village), and despite fervent pursuit the monument has not been found; it appears to have been eradicated in the Soviet period.

### ***Militaria finds, caches and UXO***

*"We collected with a friend over 30 years ago over hundred rifle bullets...My father suspected they were from Civil War, because they were already so oxidized [sic]" (CSDB:388301bd-e920-4984-8668-2c419c7dc874)*

Ten find locations of militaria memorabilia, such as equipment or unexploded ordnance (UXO), were marked by the public. Unlike the militaria find locations related to Second World War in the CSDB, these are not connected to the recent rise in the popularity of metal detecting (Seitsonen 2017). Instead they represent chance finds or stories of Civil War items. Collecting encountered military material, such as cartridges, shrapnel, or even live ammunition is internationally a common phenomenon both during and after conflicts (e.g. Moshenska 2008; Seitsonen and Koskinen-Koivisto 2017).

### ***Prison camps***

*"Former White concentration camp for Reds. Whites imprisoned here Reds and executed them. Execution happened mostly at random based on a kangaroo court. If some white has for example grudge against some Red or something like that...So have things been also in Finland like also today in many countries [sic]" (CSDB:e9605539-126b-4148-b891-a5226503fae1)*

Eight Civil War prison camps (half of the 16 official camps) were marked in the crowdsourcing. These are often liminal with memorials, execution sites and mass graves, since many of them are at the same general locations. In contemporary Finnish memory the infamous White prison camps and the poor treatment of incarcerated Reds, including women and children, loom as the most unsettling

legacies of the conflict. The infamous Tammisaari prison camp was one of those marked in the crowdsourcing (Fig. 2). Its mortality rate of 34 percent made it especially ill-famed among the White camps and captured also the attention of international press; in the other camps mortality was 4–20 percent (Lindholm 2017: 350–356). From May to September 1918 at Tammisaari some 3000 prisoners died of malnutrition, mistreatment and disease or were executed. The camp subsequently held political prisoners until 1940, and a Red memorial was finally erected at the adjacent mass grave in 1951.

### ***Other sites***

*“According to the rumor old folks did not swim in Likolampi Lake because in 1918 bodies of Red prisoners were sunk in there [sic]” (CSDB: b4f4c997-d081-4371-ae24-a0a35c48839e)*

Six Civil War entries in the CSDB do not fit into any clear categories. These include a White officer school, the beginnings of Finnish military aviation, a local museum with an abundant Civil War collection, and a couple of sites related to local folklore. In many places especially the stories of hidden graves became part of Red transgenerational memory that illustrated the clandestine memorial landscape of terror (Peltomaa 2003: 209).

### **United or divided nation? Painful memories and slow reconciliation**

Most of the Civil War POI in the YLE public crowdsourcing are connected, based on the phrasing of the public users, to the defeated Red side. This is interesting owing to the longstanding national narrative of the White victory that silenced Red remembrances for decades. Would this mean the participants were politically inclined to left? This does not seem likely based on the other entries in the CSDB, or reviews of YLE online platform which is among the five top ranking news media in Finland and reaches about 40 percent of the country’s adult population (see Seitsonen 2017). Instead, the prevalence of Red entries likely reflects the increasingly balanced handling and relatively successful national reconciliation of the Finnish Civil War as a common, shared tragedy starting since 1960s (Hentilä 2018: 268). The local post-memories underline the victims of the White terror, even if that White terror was not part of the official public or national memory. However, the experienced horrors were deeper and stronger than the state-enforced master narrative and lived in the social memory.

The road to reconciliation has been long and sometimes painful. For example, the naming of the conflict was debated strongly until the early 21st century. In the YLE crowdsourcing the neutral “events of 1918” (59 percent) or “Civil War” (26 percent) were predominantly used, and the politically-loaded terms “War of Liberation” (14 percent), “Red Rebellion” (3 percent) and “Class War” (<1 percent) were less common. The latter terms have partly turned to be social myths in the social memory of Finns. Does this mean that the political aspects of the Civil War are vanishing from the public memory?

<Figure 6 around here>

After the Civil War, the Reds’ experiences had brought expectations of public recognition of their grief, but this was not allowed to take material forms until the Second World War. Instead, Red memories lingered as haunting and covert local commemorative landscapes of brutality and oppression by victorious Whites. This is well-illustrated by the distribution of memorials for different sides of the war (Fig. 6). White monuments were mostly raised at dominant public places



during the inter-war statuomania. Importantly, these include also towns that were not affected by the Civil War, especially in northern Finland. There was a strong urge in these places to become part of the “invented traditions” (Hobshawm 1983) of remembering the War of Liberation that combined the victors of the war into an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of White Finland (Hentilä 2018: 78). Aleida Assmann (2006) has called this kind of remembrance a political memory led from top-down direction, a memory that is emotional and clear-cut, like these White monuments.

In contrast to the White monuments in dominant public spaces, the Red ones are scattered across the landscape as personified realms of memory (Nora 1996). These weave a network of local commemoration of the bloodshed at personally cherished locations, and were kept alive through the 1920s–1930s by recurring ritualistic behavior, such as clandestine visits to and offerings at them. Interestingly, this demand for secrecy gave a fresh start for some older folk traditions of commemorating the dead that had been waning away in the turn of 1900s. In the Red side’s social memory this materialized most noticeably as a revival of the rural “*karsikkopuu*” tradition of sacred trees as a covert means of remembering and marking the places of memory (Fig. 4; Peltonen 2003: 191). *Karsikkopuu* were typically pine trees marked with carved signs, such as axe marks, crosses, names or years, to commemorate the dead, and to delineate the border between the realms of the living and the dead for the deceased at least from the 13th century through the early 20th century. In some cases, rocks known as “*karsikkokivi*” were used instead of trees to honor these places (Fig. 6). Many of these clandestine places are also linked in local folklore with supernatural experiences.

Even after the allowance of commemoration after Winter War, rather than attempting to champion a Red counter-memory in public space Red memorials remained scattered in mostly non-descript places, underscoring the anonymity of White justice across the Finnish countryside. Many of these memorials had subsequently also the names of the dead added, typically since the 1970s. This represented a personalizing shift, moving on from an anonymous landscape of Red trauma to beginning to acknowledge individual Reds.

Still, the emergence of Red memorials did not yet introduce an integrated national history of the Civil War. Instead, until the 1960s the Red narrative remained opposed to a national memory that minimized, if not denied, the White terror, and cast the Civil War as a victory of freedom over the Bolshevik-inspired Reds. Interestingly, the tipping point in the national consciousness about the Civil War came with the “Under the Northern Star” novel trilogy by Finnish author Väinö Linna published in 1959–1962 and the subsequent movie in 1968 (Hentilä 2018: 244–246; Ojajärvi 2018). Linna’s novels acknowledged publicly the perspective of the lost side, and the breadth and randomness of White Terror, undermining the dominant White narrative of liberation. This shook strongly the White veil of silence, a Finnish “*cosa nostra*”, as historians Oula Silvennoinen, Marko Tikka, and Aapo Roselius (2016: 95–97) call the decades-long culture of silencing the memory of White Terror.

The destroying of Red memorials was recurrent in the 1920s–1930s, but did not end with the commencing of the national reconciliation in the 1960s. For example, as late as in 1991 an environmental artwork was ruined in the former Red industrial town of Hyvinkää. It included 178 wooden crosses inscribed with the names of the Reds killed in the area, all of which became defaced. This instigated political debates over the motivation of the culprits (Hentilä 2018: 266). In some cases, also White memorials have been degraded. The most famous of these is the statue of White General Mannerheim erected in 1956 near the spot where he directed the conquest of Tampere. It has been recurrently defaced since its erection, most recently in 2013 when the word

“butcher” and the “Antifascist Circle” symbol<sup>3</sup> were painted across the monument in red paint. These examples hint at some lingering transgenerational tensions.

Places of memory are sites of power where political memory is presented and reproduced. They are also sites where this memory can be challenged. As the memorial sites form part of landscape of power, they are ideal for representing political ideologies of the past in the present and towards the future (Dwyer and Alderman 2008). Finnish Civil War memorials, whether White or Red, are sites of past in the present, where memories of the war, whether public, social, or social myths, continue to be contested, challenged, and reproduced.

Few images are more firmly fixed in contemporary Finnish visual memory of the Civil War than the scenes of White firing squads executing Red prisoners in non-descript rural settings, such as the fields of Kiviniemi in Figure 7. This is a typical example of these anonymous images, though in this case there is suggestive evidence that the well-dressed men were staging the scene. Nevertheless, when the Finnish mint proposed a set of coins commemorating the nation’s centennial in 2017, one coin’s design was based on this image (Mähkä 2018; Tepora 2018). The plan was widely criticized and eventually the Finnish Finance Minister, who originally approved the image, concluded that “I don’t understand how it matches the spirit of Finland’s 100th anniversary ... Finland [is] 100 years old, we are together, and we are one nation” (STT 2017). In the end, the commemorative coin was withdrawn from production.

<Figure 7 around here>

## Conclusion

Until the 1960s, the Red narrative of anonymous White brutality was played out on a clandestine landscape of trauma that shaped their imagination of the civil war and kept it alive. However, by the 21st century the Finnish collective memory tends to acknowledge violence at the hands of both sides, of which one was not better than the other. The war is painted as a common national tragedy that needs its own space in the national narrative, rather than an experience of victimization alone (Hentilä 2018: 268; Peltonen 2003: 258). This has been endorsed by the temporal distancing of the Civil War, as recent surveys by Finnish historians suggest that losing a living link to the conflict has subdued tensions (Torsti 2012).

Nevertheless, the White and Red voices of Finnish Civil War can, still a century later, be heard between the lines of some of the CSDB entries, as well as in the heated discussions surrounding the statue of Mannerheim or the commemorative coin (Hentilä 2018: 307). This suggests that underlying tensions play a part in the commemoration of the Finnish Civil War, and the painful memories cannot be dealt with dispassionately. Thus, the process of reconciliation appears to be ongoing. In fact, as late as in 2017 the Finnish Criminal Police located by chance during a homicide investigation a well-maintained clandestine grave in the forests of Hausjärvi which they subsequently excavated. This proved to be a mass grave for Reds executed by the Germans when they conquered the area in 1918. This grave had been maintained by someone through decades, and fresh flowers are still brought to the site even after the bodies were removed and reburied.

There are various ways that the study of Finnish Civil War can proceed from a heritage perspective. We have, for instance, little information of the various ways the war is remembered by ethnic and other minorities, or transnationally for example in Sweden or Russia, or if it is memorized at all. The political dimension of the present relevance of Civil War heritage appears as one of the most

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<sup>3</sup> Originally used by the 1930s German antifascist paramilitary “Iron Front” organization.

urgent themes to pursue further. The process of reconciliation is entangled to some recent political developments in the Finnish society. Hentilä (2018: 287) has argued that over the past two decades certain politicians and public figures have made conscious attempts to rehabilitate the victorious Whites' War of Liberation narrative. This has taken place in a world political setting where "neonationalism", populism and far-right attitudes are, once again, gaining ground. The role of memorials in this is also intriguing. James E. Young (1992) has noted that memorials of mass destruction can liberate people from remembering, if remembrance is not actively endorsed. Monuments of both sides are still scenes for memory events, and new ones are raised especially for Reds. Conversely, there have been recent attempts by some right-wing politicians and neo-Nazis to revitalize celebrations of White Finland that were left out of use after Second World War (see Hentilä 2018; Silvennoinen et al. 2016). This parallels developments elsewhere in the world, demonstrated for example by the right-wing extremist activities in Scandinavia (Niklasson and Hølleland 2018), Britain (Bonacchi et al. 2018) and USA (Gunter & Kizzire 2019).

The public narratives in Finland, as also elsewhere, have been getting more extreme and there are disconcerting similarities to the strong political language of the 1920s–1930s. These include for example the practically fascist rhetoric heard in the Finnish Parliament of "the fight against invasive alien species [immigrants]" (IU 2019), and the leader of the Parliament's second largest party writing about the "human filth from the Horn of Africa" (Waris 2017). The recent hostile political discussions have resulted in ongoing police investigations of four parliament members of "incitement against an ethnic group" (Nieminen 2019). It remains to be seen how both the political situation and the entwined commemoration of the Finnish Civil War will evolve in the future.

## **Acknowledgements**

Authors wish to thank everybody who has taken part in the research and reviewers for their constructive feedback. Seitsonen's research has been funded by projects "Landscapes of Finnish Conflicts", "Lapland's Dark Heritage" and "Archaeology of the Mannerheim Line".

## **Declaration of interest statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## **Funding details**

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland (Research Council for Culture and Society, decision no. 275497), Foundation for the promotion of Karelian Culture, Memorial Foundation for the Dead of the War, People's Education Fund, and Karelian Foundation.

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**Table:***Table 1. Civil War sites in the CSDB; affiliation based on the phrasing in user entries.*

Site category	Affiliation			1918	Total
	White (incl. German)	Red (incl. Russian)	White and Red		
Battlefields and military positions	6	17	16	45	84
Execution sites and mass graves	5	32	2	10	49
Memorials	7	16	3	11	37
Militaria finds, caches and UXO	1	1	2	6	10
Prison camps		4		4	8
Story site		2		1	3
Airfield (on ice of Lake Näsijärvi)		1			1
Museum				1	1
Officer School	1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>194</b>



## Figure captions:

*Figure 1. Left: Main frontline of the Finnish Civil War in 1918, the Civil War sites marked into the Conflict Site Database in the YLE crowdsourcing, and the areas ceded to Soviet Union after Second World War; Right: 14-year old Arvo Koivisto (April 4, 1904–June 7, 1918), a Red Guard messenger, one of the child soldiers who took part in the Civil War. He retreated with the Reds from Tampere towards east but was caught by the Whites near Lahti on May 1st, a month after his 14th birthday. The local White Guard of his home village Tyrvää executed him in June 1918 (Vapriikki Photo archives, CC-BY).*

*Figure 2. Female prisoners are escorted into the infamous Tammissaari prison camp by the White Guard soldiers (Työväen Arkisto, TA11326).*

*Figure 3. Bullet- and shrapnel-riddled structures from Civil War marked by the public in the crowdsourcing in Helsinki. Left: A bullet hole left as a memorial in the door of the National Museum of Finland; Right: Shrapnel marks from the invading German forces' artillery fire on the sides of Pitkäsilta Bridge leading to the working-class neighborhoods (Oula Seitsonen).*

*Figure 4. "Murder Pine", the northernmost site marked in the crowdsourcing at Salla, Lapland. This tree is analogous in its function to the pre-modern rural "karsikkopuu" tradition, with marks carved on the trunk to remember the dead. The sign says "A pine – quiet witness of a murder. During Finland's Civil War in 1918 the white-guardsmen shot a red-guardsman dead on this hill. The man was temporarily buried under this pine-tree [sic]" (Oula Seitsonen).*

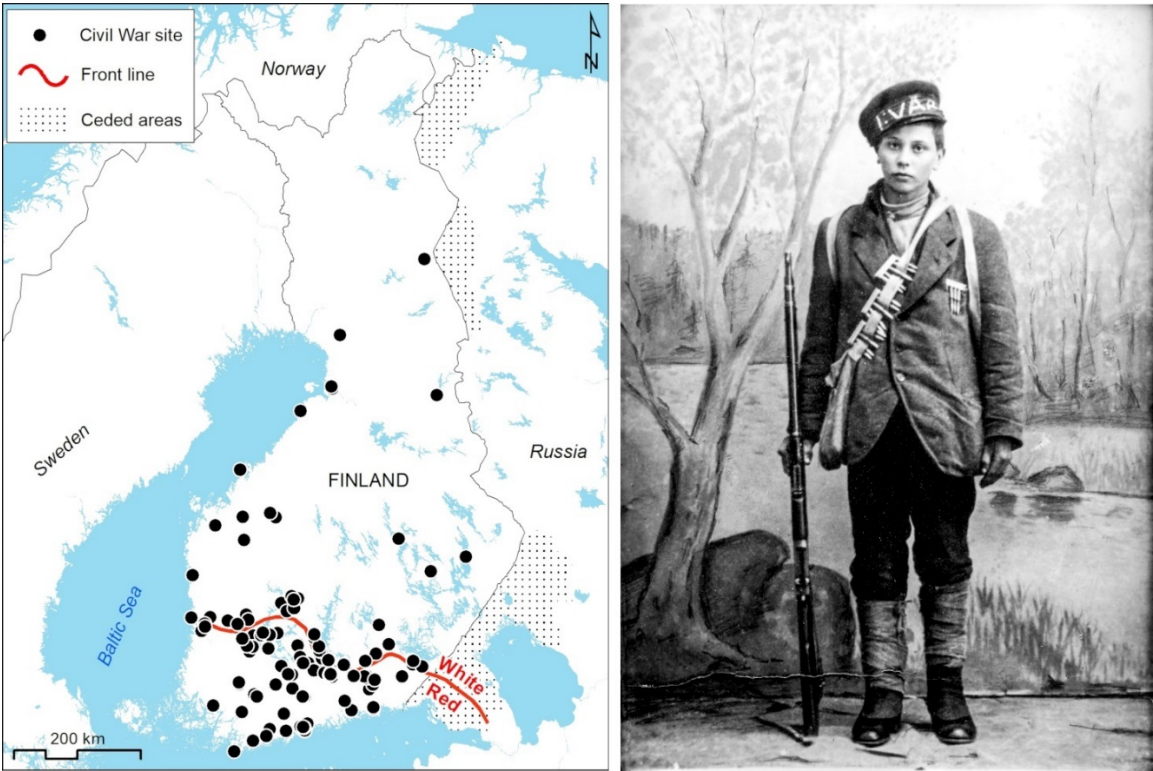
*Figure 5. Memorial to 21 anonymous Reds at Nurmo cemetery. Number of bodies is indicated by the crosses, text says: "Those who gave their lives for their [political] conviction" (Timo Ylimaunu).*

*Figure 6. Left: Distribution of the White and Red Civil War memorials; Right: An unofficial memorial, a "karsikkokivi" rock marked with a cross and year, at the execution site of Reds at Kotka Puistola photographed in 1918. Whites blew up this stone in 1930s when the Red commemoration was still forbidden (Työväen Arkisto, TA10453).*

*Figure 7. The apparently staged execution picture used as a design for the proposed commemorative coin in 2017 (Työväen Arkisto, TA10544).*

**Figures:**

*Figure 1.*



*Figure 2.*





*Figure 3.*



*Figure 4.*

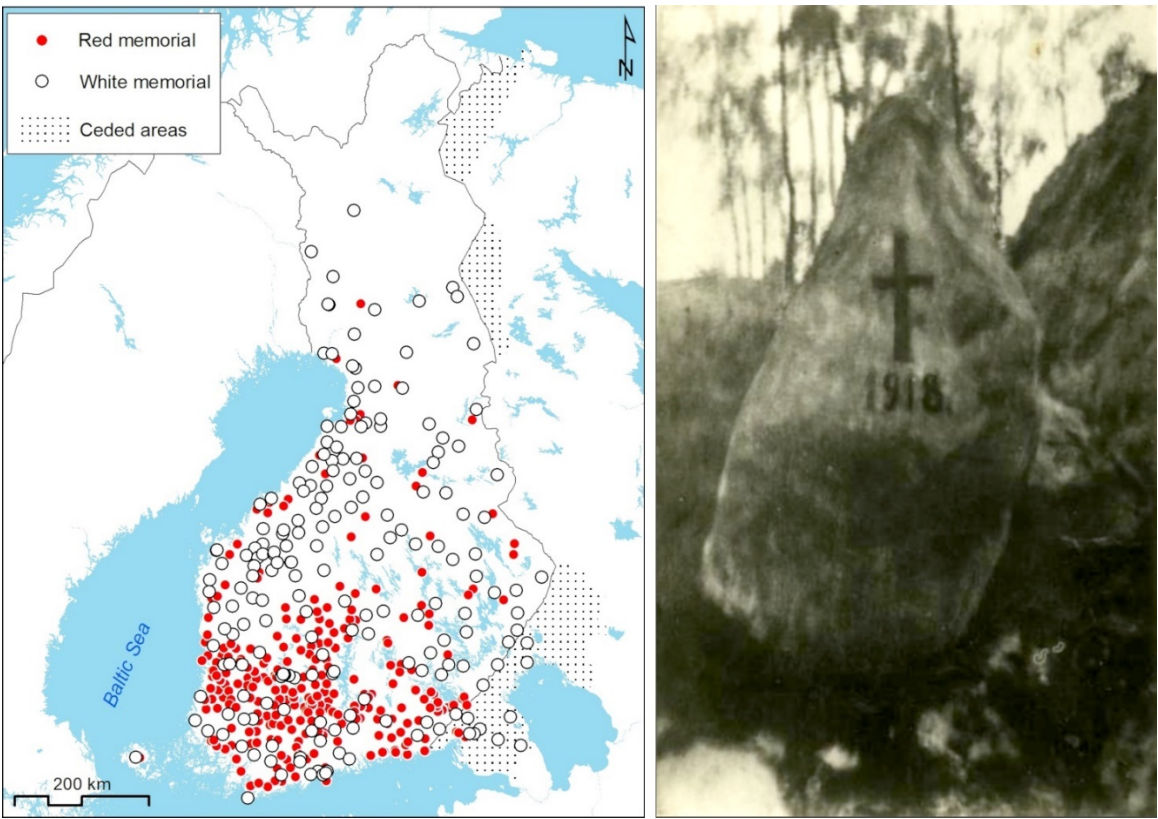




Figure 5.



Figure 6.



*Figure 7.*

